V
821·8
Bro/Dra
42737

Digitized with financial assistance from the
Government of Maharashtra
on 18 July, 2018

DRAMATIC IDYLS

DRAMATIC IDYLS

BY

ROBERT BROWNING

LONDON
SMITH, ELDER, & CO., 15 WATERLOO PLACE
1879

00042737

CONTENTS.

PAGE

MARTIN RELPH 1

PHEIDIPPIDES 27

HALBERT AND HOB 45

IVÀN IVÀNOVITCH 57

TRAY 101

NED BRATTS 107

MARTIN RELPH

MARTIN RELPH.

My grandfather says he remembers he saw, when a youngster long ago,
On a bright May day, a strange old man, with a beard as white as snow,
Stand on the hill outside our town like a monument of woe,
And, striking his bare bald head the while, sob out the reason—so!

If I last as long as Methuselah I shall never forgive
myself:
But—God forgive me, that I pray, unhappy Martin
Relph,
As coward, coward I call him—him, yes, him! Away
from me!
Get you behind the man I am now, you man that I used
to be!

What can have sewed my mouth up, set me a-stare, all
eyes, no tongue?
People have urged "You visit a scare too hard on a lad
so young!
You were taken aback, poor boy," they urge, "no time to
regain your wits:

Besides it had maybe cost you life." Ay, there is the cap
which fits !

So, cap me, the coward,—thus ! No fear ! A cuff on
the brow does good :
The feel of it hinders a worm inside which bores at the
brain for food.
See now, there certainly seems excuse : for a moment, I
trust, dear friends,
The fault was but folly, no fault of mine, or if mine, I
have made amends !

For, every day that is first of May, on the hill-top, here
stand I,

Martin Relph, and I strike my brow, and publish the reason why,
When there gathers a crowd to mock the fool. No fool, friends, since the bite
Of a worm inside is worse to bear: pray God I have baulked him quite!

I'll tell you. Certainly much excuse! It came of the way they cooped
Us peasantry up in a ring just here, close huddling because tight-hooped
By the red-coats round us villagers all: they meant we should see the sight
And take the example,—see, not speak, for speech was the Captain's right.

"You clowns on the slope, beware!" cried he: "This
woman about to die
Gives by her fate fair warning to such acquaintance as
play the spy.
Henceforth who meddle with matters of state above
them perhaps will learn
That peasants should stick to their plough-tail, leave to
the King the King's concern.

"Here's a quarrel that sets the land on fire, between
King George and his foes:
What call has a man of your kind—much less, a woman
—to interpose?
Yet you needs must be meddling, folks like you, not
foes—so much the worse!

The many and loyal should keep themselves unmixed
with the few perverse.

"Is the counsel hard to follow? I gave it you plainly a
month ago,
And where was the good? The rebels have learned just
all that they need to know.
Not a month since in we quietly marched: a week, and
they had the news,
From a list complete of our rank and file to a note of
our caps and shoes.

"All about all we did and all we were doing and like
to do!

Only, I catch a letter by luck, and capture who wrote it,
too.
Some of you men look black enough, but the milk-white
face demure
Betokens the finger foul with ink: 't is a woman who
writes, be sure!

"Is it 'Dearie, how much I miss your mouth!'—good
natural stuff, she pens?
Some sprinkle of that, for a blind, of course: with talk
about cocks and hens,
How 'robin has built on the apple-tree, and our creeper
which came to grief
Through the frost, we feared, is twining afresh round
casement in famous leaf.'

"But all for a blind! She soon glides frank into 'Horrid the place is grown
With Officers here and Privates there, no nook we may call our own:
And Farmer Giles has a tribe to house, and lodging will be to seek
For the second Company sure to come ('t is whispered) on Monday week.'

"And so to the end of the chapter! There! The murder, you see, was out:
Easy to guess how the change of mind in the rebels was brought about!
Safe in the trap would they now lie snug, had treachery made no sign:

But treachery meets a just reward, no matter if fools malign !

" That traitors had played us false, was proved—sent news which fell so pat :
And the murder was out—this letter of love, the sender of this sent that !
'T is an ugly job, though, all the same—a hateful, to have to deal
With a case of the kind, when a woman's in fault : we soldiers need nerves of steel !

" So, I gave her a chance, despatched post-haste a message to Vincent Parkes

Whom she wrote to ; easy to find he was, since one of
the King's own clerks,
Ay, kept by the King's own gold in the town close by
where the rebels camp :
A sort of a lawyer, just the man to betray our sort—the
scamp !

" 'If her writing is simple and honest and only the lover-
like stuff it looks,
And if you yourself are a loyalist, nor down in the rebels'
books,
Come quick,' said I, 'and in person prove you are each
of you clear of crime,
Or martial law must take its course : this day next week's
the time !'

"Next week is now: does he come? Not he! Clean
gone, our clerk, in a trice!
He has left his sweetheart here in the lurch: no need of
a warning twice!
His own neck free, but his partner's fast in the noose
still, here she stands
To pay for her fault. 'T is an ugly job: but soldiers
obey commands.

"And hearken wherefore I make a speech! Should any
acquaintance share
The folly that led to the fault that is now to be punished,
let fools beware!
Look black, if you please, but keep hands white: and,
above all else, keep wives—

Or sweethearts or what they may be—from ink ! Not a
word now, on your lives ! "

Black ? but the Pit's own pitch was white to the Cap-
tain's face—the brute
With the bloated cheeks and the bulgy nose and the
blood-shot eyes to suit !
He was muddled with wine, they say : more like, he was
out of his wits with fear ;
He had but a handful of men, that's true,—a riot might
cost him dear.

And all that time stood Rosamund Page, with pinioned
arms and face

Bandaged about, on the turf marked out for the party's
firing-place.
I hope she was wholly with God: I hope 'twas His angel
stretched a hand
To steady her so, like the shape of stone you see in our
church-aisle stand.

I hope there was no vain fancy pierced the bandage to
vex her eyes,
No face within which she missed without, no questions
and no replies—
"Why did you leave me to die?"—"Because . . ." Oh,
fiends, too soon you grin
At merely a moment of hell, like that—such heaven as
hell ended in!

Let mine end too! He gave the word, up went the guns in a line:

Those heaped on the hill were blind as dumb,—for, of all eyes, only mine

Looked over the heads of the foremost rank. Some fell on their knees in prayer,

Some sank to the earth, but all shut eyes, with a sole exception there.

That was myself, who had stolen up last, had sidled, behind the group:

I am highest of all on the hill-top, there stand fixed while the others stoop!

From head to foot in a serpent's twine am I tightened: touch ground?

No more than a gibbet's rigid corpse which the fetters rust around !

Can I speak, can I breathe, can I burst—aught else but see, see, only see ?

And see I do—for there comes in sight—a man, it sure must be !—

Who staggeringly, stumblingly, rises, falls, rises, at random flings his weight

On and on, anyhow onward—a man that 's mad he arrives too late !

Else why does he wave a something white high-flourished above his head ?

Why does not he call, cry,—curse the fool!—why throw
up his arms instead?
O take this fist in your own face, fool! Why does not
yourself shout "Stay!
Here 's a man comes rushing, might and main, with
something he 's mad to say?"

And a minute, only a moment, to have hell-fire boil up
in your brain,
And ere you can judge things right, choose heaven,
time 's over, repentance vain!
They level: a volley, a smoke and the clearing of smoke:
I see no more
Of the man smoke hid, nor his frantic arms, nor the
something white he bore.

But stretched on the field, some half-mile off, is an object. Surely dumb,

Deaf, blind were we struck, that nobody heard, not one of us saw him come!

Has he fainted through fright? One may well believe! What is it he holds so fast?

Turn him over, examine the face! Heyday! What, Vincent Parkes at last?

Dead! dead as she, by the self-same shot: one bullet has ended both,

Her in the body and him in the soul. They laugh at our plighted troth.

"Till death us do part?" Till death us do join past parting—that sounds like

Betrothal indeed! O Vincent Parkes, what need has my
fist to strike?

I helped you: thus were you dead and wed: one bound,
and your soul reached hers!
There is clenched in your hand the thing, signed, sealed,
the paper which plain avers
She is innocent, innocent, plain as print, with the King's
Arms broad engraved:
No one can hear, but if anyone high on the hill can see,
she 's saved!

And torn his garb and bloody his lips with heart-break,
plain it grew

How the week's delay had been brought about : each
guess at the end proved true.
It was hard to get at the folks in power : such waste of
time ! and then
Such pleading and praying, with, all the while, his lamb
in the lion's den !

And at length when he wrung their pardon out, no end
to the stupid forms—
The licence and leave : I make no doubt—what wonder
if passion warms
The pulse in a man if you play with his heart ?—he was
something hasty in speech ;
Anyhow, none would quicken the work : he had to be-
seech, beseech !

And the thing once signed, sealed, safe in his grasp,—
what followed but fresh delays?
For the floods were out, he was forced to take such a
roundabout of ways!
And 't was "Halt there!" at every turn of the road, since
he had to cross the thick
Of the red-coats: what did they care for him and his
"Quick, for God's sake, quick!"

Horse? but he had one: had it how long? till the first
knave smirked "You brag
Yourself a friend of the King's? then lend to a King's
friend here your nag!"
Money to buy another? Why, piece by piece they
plundered him still

With their "Wait you must,—no help: if aught can help
you, a guinea will!"

And a borough there was—I forget the name—whose
Mayor must have the bench
Of Justices ranged to clear a doubt: for "Vincent," thinks
he, sounds French!
It well may have driven him daft, God knows! all man
can certainly know
Is—rushing and falling and rising, at last he arrived in a
horror—so!

When a word, cry, gasp, would have rescued both! Ay,
bite me! The worm begins

At his work once more. Had cowardice proved—that only—my sin of sins !

Friends, look you here ! Suppose . . . suppose . . . But mad I am, needs must be !

Judas the Damned would never have dared such a sin as I dream ! For, see !

Suppose I had sneakingly loved her myself, my wretched self, and dreamed

In the heart of me "She were better dead than happy and his !"—while gleamed

A light from hell as I spied the pair in a perfectest embrace,

He the saviour and she the saved,—bliss born of the very murder-place !

No! Say I was scared, friends! Call me fool and coward, but nothing worse!

Jeer at the fool and gibe at the coward! 'T was ever the coward's curse

That fear breeds fancies in such: such take their shadow for substance still,

—A fiend at their back. I liked poor Parkes,—loved Vincent, if you will!

And her—why, I said "Good morrow" to her, "Good even," and nothing more:

The neighbourly way! She was just to me as fifty had been before.

So, coward it is and coward shall be! There 's a friend, now! Thanks! A drink
Of water I wanted: and now I can walk, get home by myself, I think.

PHEIDIPPIDES

PHEIDIPPIDES.

χαίρετε, νικῶμεν.

First I salute this soil of the blessed, river and rock !
Gods of my birthplace, demons and heroes, honor to all !
Then I name thee, claim thee for our patron, co-equal in
praise
—Ay, with Zeus the Defender, with Her of the ægis and
spear !
Also, ye of the bow and the buskin, praised be your
peer,
Now, henceforth and forever,—O latest to whom I up-
raise

Hand and heart and voice! For Athens, leave pasture
and flock!
Present to help, potent to save, Pan—patron I call!

Archons of Athens, topped by the tettix, see, I return!
See, 't is myself here standing alive, no spectre that
speaks!
Crowned with the myrtle, did you command me, Athens
and you,
"Run, Pheidippides, run and race, reach Sparta for aid!
Persia has come, we are here, where is She?" Your
command I obeyed,
Ran and raced: like stubble, some field which a fire runs
through,

Was the space between city and city: two days, two nights did I burn

Over the hills, under the dales, down pits and up peaks.

Into their midst I broke: breath served but for "Persia has come!

Persia bids Athens proffer slaves'-tribute, water and earth;

Razed to the ground is Eretria—but Athens, shall Athens sink,

Drop into dust and die—the flower of Hellas utterly die,

Die, with the wide world spitting at Sparta, the stupid, the stander-by?

Answer me quick, what help, what hand do you stretch o'er destruction's brink?

How,—when? No care for my limbs!—there 's lightning in all and some—
Fresh and fit your message to bear, once lips give it birth!"

O my Athens—Sparta love thee? Did Sparta respond?
Every face of her leered in a furrow of envy, mistrust,
Malice,—each eye of her gave me its glitter of gratified hate!
Gravely they turned to take counsel, to cast for excuses. I stood
Quivering,—the limbs of me fretting as fire frets, an inch' from dry wood:
"Persia has come, Athens asks aid, and still they debate?

Thunder, thou Zeus! Athene, are Spartans a quarry beyond
Swing of thy spear? Phoibos and Artemis, clang them 'Ye must'!"

No bolt launched from Olumpos! Lo, their answer at last!
"Has Persia come,—does Athens ask aid,—may Sparta befriend?
Nowise precipitate judgment—too weighty the issue at stake!
Count we no time lost time which lags through respect to the Gods!
Ponder that precept of old, 'No warfare, whatever the odds

In your favour, so long as the moon, half-orbed, is unable to take
Full-circle her state in the sky!' Already she rounds to it fast:
Athens must wait, patient as we—who judgment suspend."

Athens,—except for that sparkle,—thy name, I had mouldered to ash!
That sent a blaze through my blood; off, off and away was I back,
—Not one word to waste, one look to lose on the false and the vile!
Yet "O Gods of my land!" I cried, as each hillock and plain,

Wood and stream, I knew, I named, rushing past them again,

"Have ye kept faith, proved mindful of honors we paid you erewhile?

Vain was the filleted victim, the fulsome libation! Too rash

Love in its choice, paid you so largely service so slack!

"Oak and olive and bay,—I bid you cease to enwreathe

Brows made bold by your leaf! Fade at the Persian's foot,

You that, our patrons were pledged, should never adorn a slave!

Rather I hail thee, Parnes,—trust to thy wild waste tract!

Treeless, herbless, lifeless mountain! What matter if slacked
My speed may hardly be, for homage to crag and to cave
No deity deigns to drape with verdure,—at least I can breathe,
Fear in thee no fraud from the blind, no lie from the mute!"

Such my cry as, rapid, I ran over Parnes' ridge;
Gully and gap, I clambered and cleared till, sudden, a bar
Jutted, a stoppage of stone against me, blocking the way.
Right! for I minded the hollow to traverse, the fissure across:

"Where I could enter, there I depart by! Night in the fosse?
Out of the day dive, into the day as bravely arise! No bridge
Better!"—when—ha! what was it I came on, of wonders that are?

There, in the cool of a cleft, sat he—majestical Pan!
Ivy drooped wanton, kissed his head, moss cushioned his hoof:
All the great God was good in the eyes grave-kindly—the curl
Carved on the bearded cheek, amused at a mortal's awe,
As, under the human trunk, the goat-thighs grand I saw.
"Halt, Pheidippides!"—halt I did, my brain of a whirl:

"Hither to me! Why pale in my presence?" he gracious began:

"How is it,—Athens, only in Hellas, holds me aloof?

"Athens, she only, rears me no fane, makes me no feast!
Wherefore? Than I what godship to Athens more helpful of old?
Ay, and still, and forever her friend! Put Pan to the test!
Go, bid Athens take heart, laugh Persia to scorn, have faith
In the temples and tombs! Go, say to Athens, 'The Goat-God saith:
When Persia—so much as strews not the soil—is cast in the sea,

Then praise Pan who fought in the ranks with your most and least,
Goat-thigh to greaved-thigh, made one cause with the free and the bold!'

"Say Pan saith: 'Let this, foreshowing the place, be the pledge!'"
(Gay, the liberal hand held out this herbage I bear
—Fennel, whatever it bode—I grasped it a-tremble with dew)
"While, as for thee . . ." But enough! He was gone. If I ran hitherto—
Be sure that, the rest of my journey, I ran no longer, but flew.

Here am I back. Praise Pan, we stand no more on the
razor's edge!
Pan for Athens, Pan for me! myself have a guerdon too!

Then Miltiades spoke. "And thee, best runner of
Greece,
Whose limbs did duty indeed,—what gift is promised
thyself?
Tell it us straightway,—Athens the mother demands of
her son!"
Rosily blushed the youth: he paused: but, lifting at
length
His eyes from the ground, it seemed as he gathered the
rest of his strength

Into the utterance—"Pan spoke thus: 'For what thou hast done
Count on a worthy reward! Henceforth be allowed thee release
From the racer's toil, no vulgar reward in praise or in pelf!'

"I am bold to believe, Pan means reward the most to my mind!
Fight I shall, with our foremost, wherever this fennel may grow,—
Pound—Pan helping us—Persia to dust, and, under the deep,
Whelm her away for ever; and then,—no Athens to save,—

Marry a certain maid, I know keeps faith to the brave,—
Hie to my house and home: and, when my children shall creep
Close to my knees,—recount how the God was awful yet kind,
Promised their sire reward to the full—rewarding him —so!"

Unforseeing one! Yes, he fought on the Marathon day:
So, when Persia was dust, all cried "To Akropolis!
Run, Pheidippides, one race more! the meed is thy due!
'Athens is saved, thank Pan,' go shout!" He flung down his shield,
Ran like fire once more: and the space 'twixt the Fennel-field

And Athens was stubble again, a field which a fire runs
through,
Till in he broke : " Rejoice, we conquer ! " Like wine
through clay,
Joy in his blood bursting his heart, he died—the bliss !

So, to this day, when friend meets friend, the word of
salute
Is still " Rejoice ! "—his word which brought rejoicing
indeed.
So is Pheidippides happy for ever,—the noble strong man
Who could race like a God, bear the face of a God,
whom a God loved so well
He saw the land saved he had helped to save, and was
suffered to tell

Such tidings, yet never decline, but, gloriously as he began,

So to end gloriously—once to shout, thereafter be mute:

"Athens is saved!"—Pheidippides dies in the shout for his meed.

HALBERT AND HOB

HALBERT AND HOB.

Here is a thing that happened. Like wild beasts
whelped, for den,
In a wild part of North England, there lived once two
wild men
Inhabiting one homestead, neither a hovel nor hut,
Time out of mind their birthright: father and son, these
—but—
Such a son, such a father! Most wildness by degrees
Softens away: yet, last of their line, the wildest and
worst were these.

Criminals, then? Why, no: they did not murder and rob;

But, give them a word, they returned a blow—old Halbert as young Hob:

Harsh and fierce of word, rough and savage of deed,

Hated or feared the more—who knows?—the genuine wild-beast breed.

Thus were they found by the few sparse folk of the country-side;

But how fared each with other? E'en beasts couch, hide by hide,

In a growling, grudged agreement: so, father and son lay curled

The closelier up in their den because the last of their kind in the world.

Still, beast irks beast on occasion. One Christmas night of snow,

Came father and son to words—such words ! more cruel because the blow

To crown each word was wanting, while taunt matched gibe, and curse

Competed with oath in wager, like pastime in hell,—nay, worse :

For pastime turned to earnest, as up there sprang at last

The son at the throat of the father, seized him and held him fast.

"Out of this house you go!"—(there followed a hideous oath)—

"This oven where now we bake, too hot to hold us both!

If there's snow outside, there's coolness: out with you, bide a spell

In the drift and save the sexton the charge of a parish shell!"

Now, the old trunk was tough, was solid as stump of oak

Untouched at the core by a thousand years: much less had its seventy broke

One whipcord nerve in the muscly mass from neck to shoulder-blade

Of the mountainous man, whereon his child's rash hand like a feather weighed

Nevertheless at once did the mammoth shut his eyes,
Drop chin to breast, drop hands to sides, stand stiffened
—arms and thighs
All of a piece—struck mute, much as a sentry stands,
Patient to take the enemy's fire : his captain so commands.

Whereat the son's wrath flew to fury at such sheer scorn
Of his puny strength by the giant eld thus acting the babe
new-born :
And "Neither will this turn serve!" yelled he. "Out
with you! Trundle, log!
If you cannot tramp and trudge like a man, try all-fours
like a dog!"

Still the old man stood mute. So, logwise,—down to floor

Pulled from his fireside place, dragged on from hearth
to door,—
Was he pushed, a very log, staircase along, until
A certain turn in the steps was reached, a yard from the
house-door-sill.

Then the father opened his eyes—each spark of their
rage extinct,—
Temples, late black, dead-blanched,—right-hand with
left-hand linked,—
He faced his son submissive; when slow the accents
came,
They were strangely mild though his son's rash hand on
his neck lay all the same.

"Halbert, on such a night of a Christmas long ago,
For such a cause, with such a gesture, did I drag—so—
My father down thus far: but, softening here, I heard
A voice in my heart, and stopped: you wait for an outer word.

"For your own sake, not mine, soften you too! Untrod
Leave this last step we reach, nor brave the finger of God!
I dared not pass its lifting: I did well. I nor blame
Nor praise you. I stopped here: Halbert, do you the same!"

Straightway the son relaxed his hold of the father's throat.
They mounted, side by side, to the room again: no note

Took either of each, no sign made each to either : last
As first, in absolute silence, their Christmas-night they passed.

At dawn, the father sate on, dead, in the self-same place,
With an outburst blackening still the old bad fighting-face :
But the son crouched all a-tremble like any lamb new-yeaned.

When he went to the burial, someone's staff he borrowed,
—tottered and leaned.
But his lips were loose, not locked,—kept muttering, mumbling. "There !

At his cursing and swearing!" the youngsters cried: but
the elders thought "In prayer."
A boy threw stones: he picked them up and stored them
in his vest.

So tottered, muttered, mumbled he, till he died, perhaps
found rest.
"Is there a reason in nature for these hard hearts?" O
Lear,
That a reason out of nature must turn them soft, seems
clear!

IVÀN IVÀNOVITCH

IVAN IVANOVITCH.

"They tell me, your carpenters," quoth I to my friend the Russ,
"Make a simple hatchet serve as a tool-box serves with us.
Arm but each man with his axe, 't is a hammer and saw and plane
And chisel, and—what know I else? We should imitate in vain
The mastery wherewithal, by a flourish of just the adze,
He cleaves, clamps, dovetails in,—no need of our nails and brads,—

The manageable pine : 't is said he could shave himself
With the axe,—so all adroit, now a giant and now an elf,
Does he work and play at once !"

Quoth my friend the Russ to me,

"Ay, that and more besides on occasion ! It scarce may be
You never heard tell a tale told children, time out of mind,
By father and mother and nurse, for a moral that 's behind,
Which children quickly seize. If the incident happened at all,
We place it in Peter's time when hearts were great not small,
Germanized, Frenchified. I wager 't is old to you

As the story of Adam and Eve, and possibly quite as true."

In the deep of our land, 't is said, a village from out the woods
Emerged on the great main-road 'twixt two great solitudes.
Through forestry right and left, black verst and verst of pine,
From village to village runs the road's long wide bare line.
Clearance and clearance break the else-unconquered growth
Of pine and all that breeds and broods there, leaving loth
Man's inch of masterdom,—spot of life, spirt of fire,—

To star the dark and dread, lest right and rule expire
Throughout the monstrous wild a-hungered to resume
Its ancient sway, suck back the world into its womb :
Defrauded by man's craft which clove from North to
South
This highway broad and straight e'en from the Neva's
mouth
To Moscow's gates of gold. So, spot of life and spirt
Of fire aforesaid, burn, each village death-begirt
By wall and wall of pine—unprobed undreamed abyss.

Early one winter morn, in such a village as this,
Snow-whitened everywhere except the middle road
Ice-roughed by track of sledge, there worked by his
abode

Ivàn Ivànovitch, the carpenter, employed
On a huge shipmast trunk; his axe now trimmed and
toyed
With branch and twig, and now some chop athwart the
bole
Changed bole to billets, bared at once the sap and soul.
About him, watched the work his neighbours sheepskin-
clad;
Each bearded mouth puffed steam, each grey eye
twinkled glad
To see the sturdy arm which, never stopping play,
Proved strong man's blood still boils, freeze winter as he
may.

Sudden, a burst of bells. Out of the road, on edge

Of the hamlet—horse's hoofs galloping. "How, a sledge?
What 's here?" cried all as—in, up to the open space,
Workyard and market-ground, folks' common meeting-
place,—
Stumbled on, till he fell, in one last bound for life,
A horse: and, at his heels, a sledge held—"Dmìtri's
wife!
Back without Dmìtri too! and children—where are they?
Only a frozen corpse!"

They drew it forth: then—"Nay,
Not dead, though like to die! Gone hence a month ago:
Home again, this rough jaunt—alone through night and
snow—

What can the cause be? Hark—Droug, old horse, how
he groans:
His day 's done! Chafe away, keep chafing, for she
moans:
She 's coming to! Give here: see, motherkin, your
friends!
Cheer up, all safe at home! Warm inside makes
amends
For outside cold,—sup quick! Don't look as we were
bears!
What is it startles you? What strange adventure
stares
Up at us in your face? You know friends—which is
which?
I 'm Vàssili, he 's Sergel, Ivàn Ivànovitch . . ."

At the word, the woman's eyes, slow-wandering till they
neared
The blue eyes o'er the bush of honey-coloured beard,
Took in full light and sense and—torn to rags, some
dream
Which hid the naked truth—O loud and long the scream
She gave, as if all power of voice within her throat
Poured itself wild away to waste in one dread note!
Then followed gasps and sobs, and then the steady flow
Of kindly tears: the brain was saved, a man might know.
Down fell her face upon the good friend's propping knee;
His broad hands smoothed her head, as fain to brush it
free
From fancies, swarms that stung like bees unhived. He
soothed—

"Loukèria, Loùscha!"—still he, fondling, smoothed and smoothed.

At last her lips formed speech.

"Ivàn, dear—you indeed!
You, just the same dear you! While I . . . O intercede,
Sweet Mother, with thy Son Almighty—let his might
Bring yesterday once more, undo all done last night!
But this time yesterday, Ivàn, I sat like you,
A child on either knee, and, dearer than the two,
A babe inside my arms, close to my heart—that's lost
In morsels o'er the snow! Father, Son, Holy Ghost,
Cannot you bring again my blessed yesterday?"

When no more tears would flow, she told her tale: this way.

"Maybe, a month ago,—was it not?—news came here,
They wanted, deeper down, good workmen fit to rear
A church and roof it in. 'We 'll go,' my husband said:
'None understands like me to melt and mould their lead.'
So, friends here helped us off—Ivàn, dear, you the first!
How gay we jingled forth, all five—(my heart will burst)—
While Dmìtri shook the reins, urged Droug upon his track!

"Well, soon the month ran out, we just were coming back,
When yesterday—behold, the village was on fire!
Fire ran from house to house. What help, as, nigh and nigher,

The flames came furious? 'Haste,' cried Dmìtri, 'men must do
The little good man may: to sledge and in with you;
You and our three! We check the fire by laying flat
Each building in its path,—I needs must stay for that,—
But you . . . no time for talk! Wrap round you every rug,
Cover the couple close,—you'll have the babe to hug.
No care to guide old Droug, he knows his way, by guess,
Once start him on the road: but chirrup, none the less!
The snow lies glib as glass and hard as steel, and soon
You 'll have rise, fine and full, a marvel of a moon.
Hold straight up, all the same, this lighted twist of pitch!
Once home and with our friend Ivàn Ivànovitch,
All 's safe: I have my pay in pouch, all 's right with me,

So I but find as safe you and our precious three !
Off, Droug ! '—because the flames had reached us, and
the men
Shouted ' But lend a hand, Dmìtri—as good as ten ! '

" So, in we bundled—I, and those God gave me once ;
Old Droug, that 's stiff at first, seemed youthful for the
nonce :
He understood the case, galloping straight a-head.
Out came the moon : my twist soon dwindled, feebly red
In that unnatural day—yes, daylight, bred between
Moon-light and snow-light, lamped those grotto-depths
which screen
Such devils from God's eye. Ah, pines, how straight you
grow

Nor bend one pitying branch, true breed of brutal snow !
Some undergrowth had served to keep the devils blind
While one escaped outside their border !

" Was that—wind ?
Anyhow, Droug starts, stops, back go his ears, he snuffs,
Snorts,—never such a snort ! then plunges, knows the sough 's
Only the wind : yet, no—our breath goes up too straight !
Still the low sound,—less low, loud, louder, at a rate
There 's no mistaking more ! Shall I lean out—look—learn
The truth whatever it be ? Pad, pad ! At last, I turn—

"'T is the regular pad of the wolves in pursuit of the life in the sledge!

An army they are: close-packed they press like the thrust of a wedge:

They increase as they hunt: for I see, through the pine-trunks ranged each side,

Slip forth new fiend and fiend, make wider and still more wide

The four-footed steady advance. The foremost—none may pass:

They are elders and lead the line, eye and eye—green-glowing brass!

But a long way distant still. Droug, save us! He does his best:

Yet they gain on us, gain, till they reach,—one reaches . . .

How utter the rest?

O that Satan-faced first of the band! How he lolls out
the length of his tongue,
How he laughs and lets gleam his white teeth! He is
on me, his paws pry among
The wraps and the rugs! O my pair, my twin-pigeons,
lie still and seem dead!
Stepàn, he shall never have you for a meal,—here's your
mother instead!
No, he will not be counselled—must cry, poor Stiòpka, so
foolish! though first
Of my boy-brood, he was not the best: nay, neighbours
have called him the worst:
He was puny, an undersized slip,—a darling to me, all
the same!
But little there was to be praised in the boy, and a plenty
to blame.

I loved him with heart and soul, yes—but, deal him a
blow for a fault,
He would sulk for whole days. 'Foolish boy! lie still
or the villain will vault,
Will snatch you from over my head!' No use! he cries,
screams,—who can hold
Fast a boy in a frenzy of fear? It follows—as I foretold!
The Satan-face snatched and snapped: I tugged, I tore
—and then
His brother too needs must shriek! If one must go, 't is
men
The Tsar needs, so we hear, not ailing boys! Perhaps
My hands relaxed their grasp, got tangled in the wraps:
God, he was gone! I looked: there tumbled the cursed
crew,

Each fighting for a share : too busy to pursue !
That 's so far gain at least : Droug, gallop another verst
Or two, or three—God sends we beat them, arrive the first !
A mother who boasts two boys was ever accounted rich :
Some have not a boy : some have, but lose him,—God knows which
Is worse : how pitiful to see your weakling pine
And pale and pass away ! Strong brats, this pair of mine !

" O misery ! for while I settle to what near seems
Content, I am 'ware again of the tramp, and again there gleams—

Point and point—the line, eyes, levelled green brassy
fire !
So soon is resumed your chase? Will nothing appease,
nought tire
The furies? And yet I think—I am certain the race is
slack,
And the numbers are nothing like. Not a quarter of
the pack !
Feasters and those full-fed are staying behind . . . Ah
why ?
We 'll sorrow for that too soon ! Now,—gallop, reach
home, and die,
Nor ever again leave house, to trust our life in the trap
For life—we call a sledge ! Teriòscha, in my lap !
Yes, I 'll lie down upon you, tight-tie you with the
strings

Here—of my heart! No fear, this time, your mother flings . . .

Flings? I flung? Never! But think!—a woman, after all,

Contending with a wolf! Save you I must and shall, Terentil!

"How now? What, you still head the race,

Your eyes and tongue and teeth crave fresh food, Satan-face?

There and there! Plain I struck green fire out! Flash again?

All a poor fist can do to damage eyes proves vain!

My fist—why not crunch that? He is wanton for . . . O God,

Why give this wolf his taste? Common wolves scrape and prod

The earth till out they scratch some corpse—mere putrid
flesh!
Why must this glutton leave the faded, choose the fresh?
Terentiì—God, feel!—his neck keeps fast thy bag
Of holy things, saints' bones, this Satan-face will drag
Forth, and devour along with him our Pope declared
The relics were to save from danger!

"Spurned, not spared!
'T was through my arms, crossed arms, he—nuzzling
now with snout,
Now ripping, tooth and claw—plucked, pulled Terentiì
out,
A prize indeed! I saw—how could I else but see?—
My precious one—I bit to hold back—pulled from me!

Up came the others, fell to dancing—did the imps !—
Skipped as they scampered round. There 's one is grey,
and limps :
Who knows but old bad Màrpha,—she always owed me
spite
And envied me my births,—skulks out of doors at night
And turns into a wolf, and joins the sisterhood,
And laps the youthful life, then slinks from out the wood,
Squats down at door by dawn, spins there demure as erst
—No strength, old crone,—not she !—to crawl forth half
a verst !

"Well, I escaped with one : 'twixt one and none there lies
The space 'twixt heaven and hell. And see, a rose-light
dyes

The endmost snow : 't is dawn, 't is day, 't is safe at home !
We have outwitted you ! Ay, monsters, snarl and foam,
Fight each the other fiend, disputing for a share,—
Forgetful, in your greed, our finest off we bear
Tough Droug and I,—my babe, my boy that shall be man,
My man that shall be more, do all a hunter can
To trace and follow and find and catch and crucify
Wolves, wolfkins, all your crew !. A thousand deaths
shall die
The whimperingest cub that ever squeezed the teat !
'Take that !' we'll stab you with,—'the tenderness we
met
When, wretches, you danced round—not this, thank God
—not this !
Hellhounds, we baulk you !'

"But—Ah, God above!—Bliss, bliss—
Not the band, no! And yet—yes, for Droug knows
him! One—
Of them all, only this has said 'She saves a son!'
His fellows disbelieve such luck: but he believes,
He lets them pick the bones, laugh at him in their
sleeves:
He 's off and after us,—one speck, one spot, one ball
Grows bigger, bound on bound,—one wolf as good
as all!
O but I know the trick! Have at the snaky tongue!
That 's the right way with wolves! Go, tell your mates
I wrung
The panting morsel out, left you to howl your
worst!

Now for it—now! Ah me! I know him—thrice-
accurst
Satan-face,—him to the end my foe!

"All fight's in vain
This time the green brass points pierce to my very brain.
I fall—fall as I ought—quite on the babe I guard:
I overspread with flesh the whole of him. Too hard
To die this way, torn piecemeal? Move hence? Not
I—one inch!
Gnaw through me, through and through: flat thus I lie
nor flinch!
O God, the feel of the fang furrowing my shoulder!—see!
It grinds—it grates the bone. O Kirill under me,
Could I do more? Besides he knew wolf's-way to win:

I clung, closed round like wax : yet in he wedged and in,
Past my neck, past my breasts, my heart, until . . . how
feels
The onion-bulb your knife parts, pushing through its
peels,
Till out you scoop its clove wherein lie stalk and leaf
And bloom and seed unborn?

"That slew me: yes, in brief,
I died then, dead I lay doubtlessly till Droug stopped
Here, I suppose. I come to life, I find me propped
Thus—how or when or why,—I know not. Tell me,
friends,
All was a dream : laugh quick and say the nightmare
ends!

Soon I shall find my house : 't is over there : in proof,
Save for that chimney heaped with snow, you 'd see the roof
Which holds my three—my two—my one—not one?

" Life's mixed
With misery, yet we live—must live. The Satan fixed
His face on mine so fast, I took its print as pitch
Takes what it cools beneath. Ivàn Ivànovitch,
'T is you unharden me, you thaw, disperse the thing !
Only keep looking kind, the horror will not cling.
Your face smooths fast away each print of Satan. Tears
—What good they do ! Life 's sweet, and all its after-years,
Ivàn Ivànovitch, I owe you ! Yours am I !
May God reward you, dear ! "

Down she sank. Solemnly
Ivàn rose, raised his axe,—for fitly, as she knelt,
Her head lay: well-apart, each side, her arms hung,—
dealt
Lightning-swift thunder-strong one blow—no need of
more!
Headless she knelt on still: that pine was sound at
core
(Neighbours were used to say)—cast-iron-kerneled—
which
Taxed for a second stroke Ivàn Ivànovitch.

The man was scant of words as strokes. "It had to be:
I could no other: God it was bade 'Act for me!'"
Then stooping, peering round—what is it now he lacks?
A proper strip of bark wherewith to wipe his axe.

Which done, he turns, goes in, closes the door behind.
The others mute remain, watching the blood-snake wind
Into a hiding-place among the splinter-heaps.

At length, still mute, all move : one lifts,—from where it steeps
Redder each ruddy rag of pine,—the head : two more
Take up the dripping body : then, mute still as before,
Move in a sort of march, march on till marching ends
Opposite to the church ; where halting,—who suspends,
By its long hair, the thing, deposits in its place
The piteous head : once more the body shows no trace
Of harm done : there lies whole the Loùscha, maid and wife
And mother, loved until this latest of her life.

Then all sit on the bank of snow which bounds a space
Kept free before the porch for judgment : just the place !

Presently all the souls, man, woman, child, which make
The village up, are found assembling for the sake
Of what is to be done. The very Jews are there :
A Gipsy-troop, though bound with horses for the Fair,
Squats with the rest. Each heart with its conception seethes
And simmers, but no tongue speaks : one may say,—none breathes.

Anon from out the church totters the Pope—the priest—
Hardly alive, so old, a hundred years at least.
With him, the Commune's head, a hoary senior too,

Stàrosta, that 's his style,—like Equity Judge with you,—
Natural Jurisconsult : then, fenced about with furs,
Pomeschìk,—Lord of the Land, who wields—and none demurs—
A power of life and death. They stoop, survey the corpse.

Then, straightened on his staff, the Stàrosta—the thorpe's
Sagaciousest old man—hears what you just have heard,
From Droug's first inrush, all, up to Ivàn's last word
" God bade me act for him : I dared not disobey ! "

Silence—the Pomeschìk broke with " A wild wrong way
Of righting wrong—if wrong there were, such wrath to rouse !

Why was not law observed? What article allows
Whoso may please to play the judge, and, judgment
dealt,
Play executioner, as promptly as we pelt
To death, without appeal, the vermin whose sole fault
Has been—it dared to leave the darkness of its vault,
Intrude upon our day! Too sudden and too rash!
What was this woman's crime? Suppose the church
should crash
Down where I stand, your lord: bound are my serfs to
dare
Their utmost that I 'scape: yet, if the crashing scare
My children,—as you are,—if sons fly, one and all,
Leave father to his fate,—poor cowards though I call
The runaways, I pause before I claim their life

Because they prized it more than mine. I would each wife
Died for her husband's sake, each son to save his sire :
'T is glory, I applaud—scarce duty, I require.
Ivàn Ivànovitch has done a deed that 's named
Murder by law and me : who doubts, may speak unblamed ! "

All turned to the old Pope. " Ay, children, I am old—
How old, I get myself to know no longer. Rolled
Quite round, my orb of life, from infancy to age,
Seems passing back again to youth. A certain stage
At least I reach, or dream I reach, where I discern
Truer truths, laws behold more lawlike than we learn
When first we set our foot to tread the course I trod

With man to guide my steps : who leads me now is God.
'Your young men shall see visions :' and in my youth
I saw
And paid obedience to man's visionary law :
'Your old men shall dream dreams :' and, in my age,
a hand
Conducts me through the cloud round law to where I
stand
Firm on its base,—know cause, who, before, knew effect.

"The world lies under me : and nowhere I detect
So great a gift as this—God's own—of human life.
'Shall the dead praise thee?' No! 'The whole live
world is rife,

God, with thy glory,' rather ! Life then, God's best of gifts,
For what shall man exchange? For life—when so he shifts
The weight and turns the scale, lets life for life restore
God's balance, sacrifice the less to gain the more,
Substitute—for low life, another's or his own—
Life large and liker God's who gave it : thus alone
May life extinguish life that life may trulier be !
How low this law descends on earth, is not for me
To trace : complexed becomes the simple, intricate
The plain, when I pursue law's winding. 'T is the straight
Outflow of law I know and name : to law, the fount
Fresh from God's footstool, friends, follow while I remount.

"A mother bears a child : perfection is complete
So far in such a birth. Enabled to repeat
The miracle of life,—herself was born so just
A type of womankind, that God sees fit to trust
Her with the holy task of giving life in turn.
Crowned by this crowning pride,—how say you, should
she spurn
Regality—discrowned, unchilded, by her choice
Of barrenness exchanged for fruit which made rejoice
Creation, though life's self were lost in giving birth
To life more fresh and fit to glorify God's earth ?
How say you, should the hand God trusted with life's
torch
Kindled to light the world—aware of sparks that scorch,
Let fall the same ? Forsooth, her flesh a fire-flake stings :

The mother drops the child! Among what monstrous things
Shall she be classed? Because of motherhood, each male
Yields to his partner place, sinks proudly in the scale:
His strength owned weakness, wit—folly, and courage—fear,
Beside the female proved male's mistress—only here.
The fox-dam, hunger-pined, will slay the felon sire
Who dares assault her whelp: the beaver, stretched on fire,
Will die without a groan: no pang avails to wrest
Her young from where they hide—her sanctuary breast.
What 's here then? Answer me, thou dead one, as, I trow,
Standing at God's own bar, he bids thee answer now!

Thrice crowned wast thou—each crown of pride, a child
—thy charge!
Where are they? Lost? Enough: no need that thou
enlarge
On how or why the loss: life left to utter 'lost'
Condemns itself beyond appeal. The soldier's post
Guards from the foe's attack the camp he sentinels:
That he no traitor proved, this and this only tells—
Over the corpse of him trod foe to foe's success.
Yet—one by one thy crowns torn from thee—thou no less
To scare the world, shame God,—livedst! I hold he
saw
The unexampled sin, ordained the novel law,
Whereof first instrument was first intelligence
Found loyal here. I hold that, failing human sense

The very earth had oped, sky fallen, to efface
Humanity's new wrong, motherhood's first disgrace.
Earth oped not, neither fell the sky, for prompt was found
A man and man enough, head-sober and heart-sound,
Ready to hear God's voice, resolute to obey.
Ivàn Ivànovitch, I hold, has done, this day,
No otherwise than did, in ages long ago,
Moses when he made known the purport of that flow
Of fire athwart the law's twain-tables! I proclaim
Ivàn Ivànovitch God's servant!"

At which name
Uprose that creepy whisper from out the crowd, is won
To swell and surge and sink when fellow-men confront
A punishment that falls on fellow flesh and blood,
Appallingly beheld—shudderingly understood,

No less, to be the right, the just, the merciful.

"God's servant!" hissed the crowd.

When that Amen grew dull

And died away and left acquittal plain adjudged,

"Amen!" last sighed the lord. "There 's none shall say I grudged

Escape from punishment in such a novel case.

Deferring to old age and holy life,—be grace

Granted! say I. No less, scruples might shake a sense

Firmer than I boast mine. Law 's law, and evidence

Of breach therein lies plain,—blood-red-bright,—all may see!

Yet all absolve the deed: absolved the deed must be!

"And next—as mercy rules the hour—methinks 't were well
You signify forthwith its sentence, and dispel
The doubts and fears, I judge, which busy now the head
Law puts a halter round—a halo—you, instead!
Ivàn Ivànovitch—what think you he expects
Will follow from his feat? Go, tell him—law protects
Murder, for once: no need he longer keep behind
The Sacred Pictures—where skulks Innocence enshrined.
Or I missay! Go, some! You others, haste and hide
The dismal object there: get done, whate'er betide!"

So, while the youngers raised the corpse, the elders trooped
Silently to the house: where halting, someone stooped,

Listened beside the door ; all there was silent too.
Then they held counsel ; then pushed door and, passing
through,
Stood in the murderer's presence.
Ivàn Ivànovitch
Knelt, building on the floor that Kremlin rare and rich
He deftly cut and carved on lazy winter nights.
Some five young faces watched, breathlessly, as, to rights,
Piece upon piece, he reared the fabric nigh complete.
Stèscha, Ivàn's old mother, sat spinning by the heat
Of the oven where his wife Kàtia stood baking bread.
Ivàn's self, as he turned his honey-coloured head,
Was just in act to drop, 'twixt fir-cones,—each a dome,—
The scooped-out yellow gourd presumably the home
Of Kolokol the Big : the bell, therein to hitch,

—An acorn-cup—was ready : Ivàn Ivànovitch

Turned with it in his mouth.

They told him he was free

As air to walk abroad. "How otherwise?" asked he.

42737

TRAY.

Sing me a hero ! Quench my thirst

Of soul, ye bards !

Quoth Bard the first :

" Sir Olaf, the good knight, did don

His helm and eke his habergeon . . ."

Sir Olaf and his bard—— !

" That sin-scathed brow " (quoth Bard the second)

" That eye wide ope as though Fate beckoned

My hero to some steep, beneath

Which precipice smiled tempting Death . . ."
You too without your host have reckoned!

"A beggar-child" (let 's hear this third!)
"Sat on a quay's edge : like a bird
Sang to herself at careless play,
And fell into the stream. 'Dismay!
Help, you the standers-by!' None stirred.

"Bystanders reason, think of wives
And children ere they risk their lives.
Over the balustrade has bounced
A mere instinctive dog, and pounced
Plumb on the prize. 'How well he dives!

" ' Up he comes with the child, see, tight
In mouth, alive too, clutched from quite
A depth of ten feet—twelve, I bet !
Good dog ! What, off again ? There 's yet
Another child to save ? All right !

" ' How strange we saw no other fall !
It 's instinct in the animal.
Good dog ! But he 's a long while under :
If he got drowned I should not wonder—
Strong current, that against the wall !

" ' Here he comes, holds in mouth this time
—What may the thing be ? Well, that 's prime !
Now, did you ever ? Reason reigns

In man alone, since all Tray's pains
Have fished—the child's doll from the slime!'

"And so, amid the laughter gay,
Trotted my hero off,—old Tray,—
Till somebody, prerogatived
With reason, reasoned: 'Why he dived,
His brain would show us, I should say.

"'John, go and catch—or, if needs be,
Purchase that animal for me!
By vivisection, at expense
Of half-an-hour and eighteen pence,
How brain secretes dog's soul, we'll see!'"

NED BRATTS

NED BRATTS.

'T was Bedford Special Assize, one daft Midsummer's
Day :
A broiling blasting June,—was never its like, men say.
Corn stood sheaf-ripe already, and trees looked yellow
as that ;
Ponds drained dust-dry, the cattle lay foaming around
each flat.
Inside town, dogs went mad, and folks kept bibbing beer
While the parsons prayed for rain. 'T was horrible, yes
—but queer :

Queer—for the sun laughed gay, yet nobody moved a hand
To work one stroke at his trade : as given to understand
That all was come to a stop, work and such worldly ways,
And the world's old self about to end in a merry blaze.
Midsummer's Day moreover was the first of Bedford Fair ;
So, Bedford Town's tag-rag and bobtail lay bowsing there.

But the Court House, Quality crammed : through doors ope, windows wide,
High on the Bench you saw sit Lordships side by side.
There frowned Chief Justice Jukes, fumed learned Brother Small,

And fretted their fellow Judge : like threshers, one and all,

Of a reek with laying down the law in a furnace. Why?

Because their lungs breathed flame—the regular crowd forbye—

From gentry pouring in—quite a nosegay, to be sure !

How else could they pass the time, six mortal hours endure

Till night should extinguish day, when matters might haply mend ?

Meanwhile no bad resource was—watching begin and end

Some trial for life and death, in a brisk five minutes' space,

And betting which knave would 'scape, which hang, from his sort of face.

So, their Lordships toiled and moiled, and a deal of work was done
(I warrant) to justify the mirth of the crazy sun,
As this and 't other lout, struck dumb at the sudden show
Of red robes and white wigs, boggled nor answered "Boh!"
When asked why he, Tom Styles, should not—because Jack Nokes
Had stolen the horse—be hanged: for Judges must have their jokes,
And louts must make allowance—let 's say, for some blue fly
Which punctured a dewy scalp where the frizzles stuck awry—
Else Tom had fleered scot-free, so nearly over and done

Was the main of the job. Full-measure, the gentles enjoyed their fun,
As a twenty-five were tried, rank puritans caught at prayer
In a cow-house and laid by the heels,—have at 'em, devil may care!—
And ten were prescribed the whip, and ten a brand on the cheek,
And five a slit of the nose—just leaving enough to tweak.

Well, things at jolly high-tide, amusement steeped in fire,
While noon smote fierce the roof's red tiles to heart's desire,
The Court a-simmer with smoke, one ferment of oozy flesh,

One spirituous humming musk mount-mounting until its mesh

Entoiled all heads in a fluster, and Serjeant Postlethwayte

—Dashing the wig oblique as he mopped his oily pate—

Cried "Silence, or I grow grease! No loophole lets in air?

Jurymen,—Guilty, Death! Gainsay me if you dare!"

—Things at this pitch, I say,—what hubbub without the doors?

What laughs, shrieks, hoots and yells, what rudest of uproars?

Bounce through the barrier-throng a bulk comes rolling vast!

Thumps, kicks,—no manner of use!—spite of them rolls
at last
Into the midst a ball which, bursting, brings to view
Publican Black Ned Bratts and Tabby his big wife
too:
Both in a muck-sweat, both . . . were never such eyes
uplift
At the sight of yawning hell, such nostrils—snouts that
sniffed
Sulphur, such mouths a-gape ready to swallow flame!
Horrified, hideous, frank fiend-faces! yet, all the same,
Mixed with a certain . . . eh? how shall I dare style—
mirth
The desperate grin of the guess that, could they break
from earth,

Heaven was above, and hell might rage in impotence
Below the saved, the saved!

"Confound you! (no offence!)
Out of our way,—push, wife! Yonder their Worships be!"
Ned Bratts has reached the bar, and "Hey, my Lords,"
roars he,
"A Jury of life and death, Judges the prime of the land,
Constables, javelineers,—all met, if I understand,
To decide so knotty a point as whether 't was Jack or Joan
Robbed the henroost, pinched the pig, hit the King's Arms with a stone,

Dropped the baby down the well, left the tithesman in
the lurch,
Or, three whole Sundays running, not once attended
church!
What a pother—do these deserve the parish-stocks or
whip,
More or less brow to brand, much or little nose to snip,—
When, in our Public, plain stand we—that's we stand
here,
I and my Tab, brass-bold, brick-built of beef and beer,
—Do not we, slut? Stand forth and show your beauty,
jade!
Wife of my bosom—that's the word now! What a
trade
We drove! None said us nay: nobody loved his life

So little as wag a tongue against us,—did they, wife?
Yet they knew us all the while, in their hearts, for what
we are
—Worst couple, rogue and quean, unhanged—search
near and far!
Eh, Tab? The pedlar, now—o'er his noggin—who
warned a mate
To cut and run, nor risk his pack where its loss of weight
Was the least to dread,—aha, how we two laughed a-good
As, stealing round the midden, he came on where I stood
With billet poised and raised,—you, ready with the rope,—
Ah, but that 's past, that 's sin repented of, we hope!
Men knew us for that same, yet safe and sound stood we!
The lily-livered knaves knew too (I've baulked a d——)
Our keeping the 'Pied Bull' was just a mere pretence:

Too slow make food, drink, lodging, the pounds from out
the pence!
There's not a stoppage has chanced to travel, this ten
long year;
No break into hall or grange, no lifting of nag or steer,
Not a single roguery, from the cutting of a purse
To the cutting of a throat, but paid us toil. Od's curse!
When Gipsy Smouch made bold to cheat us of our due,
—Eh, Tab? the Squire's strong-box we helped the
rascal to—
I think he pulled a face, next Sessions' swinging-time!
He danced the jig that needs no floor,—and, here's the
prime,
'T was Scroggs that houghed the mare! Ay, those were
busy days!

"Well, there we flourished brave, like scripture-trees
called bays,
Faring high, drinking hard, in money up to head
—Not to say, boots and shoes, when . . . Zounds, I
nearly said—
Lord, to unlearn one's language! How shall we labour,
wife?
Have you, fast hold, the Book? Grasp, grip it, for your
life!
See, sirs, here 's life, salvation! Here 's—hold but out
my breath—
When did I speak so long without once swearing?
'Sdeath,
No, nor unhelped by ale since man and boy! And yet
All yesterday I had to keep my whistle wet

While reading Tab this Book : book? don't say 'book'—
they 're plays,
Songs, ballads and the like : here 's no such strawy blaze,
But sky wide ope, sun, moon, and seven stars out full-
flare !
Tab, help and tell ! I 'm hoarse. A mug ! or—no, a
prayer !
Dip for one out of the Book ! Who wrote it in the Jail
—He plied his pen unhelped by beer, sirs, I 'll be bail !

" I 've got my second wind. In trundles she—that 's Tab.
' Why, Gammer, what 's come now, that—bobbing like a
crab
On Yule-tide bowl—your head 's a-work and both your
eyes

Break loose? Afeard, you fool? As if the dead can
rise!
Say—Bagman Dick was found last May with fuddling-cap
Stuffed in his mouth: to choke 's a natural mishap!'
'Gaffer, be—blessed,' cries she, 'and Bagman Dick as
well!
I, you, and he are damned: this Public is our hell:
We live in fire: live coals don't feel!—once quenched,
they learn—
Cinders do, to what dust they moulder while they burn!'

"'If you don't speak straight out,' says I—belike I swore—
'A knobstick, well you know the taste of, shall, once
more,

Teach you to talk, my maid!' She ups with such a face,
Heart sunk inside me. 'Well, pad on, my prate-apace!'

"'I've been about those laces we need for . . . never
mind!
If henceforth they tie hands, 't is mine they'll have to
bind.
You know who makes them best—the Tinker in our cage,
Pulled-up for gospelling, twelve years ago: no age
To try another trade,—yet, so he scorned to take
Money he did not earn, he taught himself the make
Of laces, tagged and tough—Dick Bagman found them
so!
Good customers were we! Well, last week, you must
know,

His girl,—the blind young chit, who hawks about his wares,—
She takes it in her head to come no more—such airs
These hussies have! Yet, since we need a stoutish lace,—
"I 'll to the jail-bird father, abuse her to his face!"
So, first I filled a jug to give me heart, and then,
Primed to the proper pitch, I posted to their den—
Patmore—they style their prison! I tip the turnkey, catch
My heart up, fix my face, and fearless lift the latch—
Both arms a-kimbo, in bounce with a good round oath
Ready for rapping out: no "Lawks" nor "By my troth!"

"'There sat my man, the father. He looked up: what one feels

When heart that leapt to mouth drops down again to heels!

He raised his hand . . . Hast seen, when drinking out the night,

And in, the day, earth grow another something quite

Under the sun's first stare? I stood a very stone.

"'"Woman!" (a fiery tear he put in every tone),

"How should my child frequent your house where lust is sport,

Violence—trade? Too true! I trust no vague report.

Her angel's hand, which stops the sight of sin, leaves clear

The other gate of sense, lets outrage through the ear.

What has she heard!—which, heard shall never be again.

Better lack food than feast, a Dives in the—wain
Or reign or train—of Charles!" (His language was not
ours :
'T is my belief, God spoke : no tinker has such powers).
"Bread, only bread they bring—my laces : if we broke
Your lump of leavened sin, the loaf's first crumb would
choke!"

"'Down on my marrow-bones! Then all at once rose he :
His brown hair burst a-spread, his eyes were suns to see :
Up went his hands : "Through flesh, I reach, I read thy
soul!
So may some stricken tree look blasted, bough and bole,
Champed by the fire-tooth, charred without, and yet,
thrice-bound

With dreriment about, within may life be found,
A prisoned power to branch and blossom as before,
Could but the gardener cleave the cloister, reach the core,
Loosen the vital sap : yet where shall help be found?
Who says 'How save it?'—nor 'Why cumbers it the ground?'
Woman, that tree art thou! All sloughed about with scurf,
Thy stag-horns fright the sky, thy snake-roots sting the turf!
Drunkenness, wantonness, theft, murder gnash and gnarl
Thine outward, case thy soul with coating like the marle
Satan stamps flat upon each head beneath his hoof!
And how deliver such? The strong men keep aloof,
Lover and friend stand far, the mocking ones pass by,

Tophet gapes wide for prey : lost soul, despair and die !
What then ? 'Look unto me and be ye saved!' saith
God :
'I strike the rock, outstreats the life-stream at my rod ![1]
Be your sins scarlet, wool shall they seem like,—although
As crimson red, yet turn white as the driven snow !' "

" 'There, there, there ! All I seem to somehow under-
stand
Is—that, if I reached home, 't was through the guiding
hand
Of his blind girl which led and led me through the streets
And out of town and up to door again. What greets

[1] They did not eat
His flesh, nor suck those oils which thence outstreat.
Donne's *Progress of the Soul*, line 344.

First thing my eye, as limbs recover from their swoon?
A book—this Book she gave at parting. "Father's boon—
The Book he wrote: it reads as if he spoke himself:
He cannot preach in bonds, so,—take it down from shelf
When you want counsel,—think you hear his very voice!"

"'Wicked dear Husband, first despair and then rejoice!
Dear wicked Husband, waste no tick of moment more,
Be saved like me, bald trunk! There 's greenness yet at core,
Sap under slough! Read, read!'
"Let me take breath, my lords!
I 'd like to know, are these—hers, mine, or Bunyan's words?

I 'm 'wildered—scarce with drink,—nowise with drink alone !

You 'll say, with heat : but heat 's no stuff to split a stone

Like this black boulder—this flint heart of mine : the Book—

That dealt the crashing blow ! Sirs, here 's the fist that shook

His beard till Wrestler Jem howled like a just-lugged bear !

You had brained me with a feather : at once I grew aware

Christmas was meant for me. A burden at your back,

Good Master Christmas ? Nay,—yours was that Joseph's sack,

—Or whose it was,—which held the cup,—compared
with mine!

Robbery loads my loins, perjury cracks my chine,

Adultery . . . nay, Tab, you pitched me as I flung!

One word, I 'll up with fist . . . No. sweet spouse, hold
your tongue!

"I 'm hasting to the end. The Book, sirs—take and
read!

You have my history in a nutshell,—ay, indeed:

It must off, my burden! See,—slack straps and into pit,

Roll, reach the bottom, rest, rot there—a plague on it!

For a mountain 's sure to fall and bury Bedford Town,

'Destruction'—that 's the name, and fire shall burn it
down!

O 'scape the wrath in time! Time 's now, if not too late.

How can I pilgrimage up to the wicket-gate?

Next comes Despond the slough : not that I fear to pull

Through mud, and dry my clothes at brave House Beautiful—

But it 's late in the day, I reckon : had I left years ago

Town, wife, and children dear . . . Well, Christmas did, you know !—

Soon I had met in the valley and tried my cudgel's strength

On the enemy horned and winged, a-straddle across its length!

Have at his horns, thwick—thwack : they snap, see! Hoof and hoof—

Bang, break the fetlock-bones! For love's sake, keep aloof
Angels! I 'm man and match,—this cudgel for my flail,—
To thresh him, hoofs and horns, bat's wing and serpent's tail!
A chance gone by! But then, what else does Hopeful ding
Into the deafest ear except—hope, hope 's the thing?
Too late i' the day for me to thrid the windings: but
There 's still a way to win the race by death's short cut!
Did Master Faithful need climb the Delightful Mounts?
No, straight to Vanity Fair,—a fair, by all accounts,
Such as is held outside,—lords, ladies, grand and gay,—
Says he in the face of them, just what you hear me say.

And the Judges brought him in guilty, and brought him
out
To die in the market-place—St. Peter's Green 's about
The same thing: there they flogged, flayed, buffeted,
lanced with knives,
Pricked him with swords,—I 'll swear, he 'd full a cat's
nine lives,—
So to his end at last came Faithful,—ha, ha, he!
Who holds the highest card? for there stands hid, you
see,
Behind the rabble-rout, a chariot, pair and all:
He 's in, he 's off, he 's up, through clouds, at trumpet-call,
Carried the nearest way to Heaven-gate! Odds my
life—
Has nobody a sword to spare? not even a knife?

Then hang me, draw and quarter! Tab—do the same by her!

O Master Worldly-Wiseman . . . that's Master Interpreter,

Take the will, not the deed! Our gibbet's handy, close:

Forestall Last Judgment-Day! Be kindly, not morose!

There wants no earthly judge-and-jurying: here we stand—

Sentence our guilty selves: so, hang us out of hand!

Make haste for pity's sake! A single moment's loss

Means—Satan's lord once more: his whisper shoots across

All singing in my heart, all praying in my brain,

'It comes of heat and beer!'—hark how he guffaws
plain!
'To-morrow you'll wake bright, and, in a safe skin, hug
Your sound selves, Tab and you, over a foaming jug!
You've had such qualms before, time out of mind!'
He's right!
Did not we kick and cuff and curse away, that night
When home we blindly reeled, and left poor humpback
Joe
I' the lurch to pay for what . . . somebody did, you
know!
Both of us maundered then 'Lame humpback,—never
more
Will he come limping, drain his tankard at our
door!

He 'll swing, while—somebody . . .' Says Tab, 'No, for I 'll peach!'

'I 'm for you, Tab,' cries I, 'there's rope enough for each!'

So blubbered we, and bussed, and went to bed upon

The grace of Tab's good thought: by morning, all was gone!

We laughed—'What's life to him, a cripple of no account?'

Oh, waves increase around—I feel them mount and mount!

Hang us! To-morrow brings Tom Bearward with his bears:

One new black-muzzled brute beats Sackerson, he swears:

(Sackerson, for my money !) And, baiting o'er, the Brawl
They lead on Turner's Patch,—lads, lasses, up tails all,—
I 'm i' the thick o' the throng ! That means the Iron Cage,
—Means the Lost Man inside ! Where 's hope for such as wage
War against light ? Light 's left, light 's here, I hold light still,
So does Tab—make but haste to hang us both ! You will ? "

I promise, when he stopped you might have heard a mouse
Squeak, such a death-like hush sealed up the old Mote House.

But when the mass of man sank meek upon his knees,
While Tab, alongside, wheezed a hoarse "Do hang us, please!"
Why, then the waters rose, no eye but ran with tears,
Hearts heaved, heads thumped, until, paying all past arrears
Of pity and sorrow, at last a regular scream outbroke
Of triumph, joy and praise.
My Lord Chief Justice spoke,
First mopping brow and cheek, where still, for one that budged,
Another bead broke fresh: "What Judge, that ever judged
Since first the world began, judged such a case as this?
Why, Master Bratts, long since, folks smelt you out, I wis!

I had my doubts, i' faith, each time you played the fox
Convicting geese of crime in yonder witness-box—
Yea, much did I misdoubt, the thief that stole her eggs
Was hardly goosey's self at Reynard's game, i' feggs!
Yet thus much was to praise—you spoke to point, direct—
Swore you heard, saw the theft: no jury could suspect—
Dared to suspect,—I 'll say,—a spot in white so clear:
Goosey was throttled, true: but thereof godly fear
Came of example set, much as our laws intend;
And, though a fox confessed, you proved the Judge's friend.
What if I had my doubts? Suppose I gave them breath,
Brought you to bar; what work to do, ere 'Guilty, Death'

Had paid our pains! What heaps of witnesses to drag
From holes and corners, paid from out the County's
bag!
Trial three dog-days long! *Amicus Curiæ*—that 's
Your title, no dispute—truth-telling Master Bratts!
Thank you, too, Mistress Tab! Why doubt one word
you say?
Hanging you both deserve, hanged both shall be this
day!
The tinker needs must be a proper man. I 've heard
He lies in Jail long since: if Quality 's good word
Warrants me letting loose,—some householder, I mean—
Freeholder, better still,—I don't say but—between
Now and next Sessions . . . Well! Consider of his
case,

I promise to, at least : we owe him so much grace.
Not that—no, God forbid !—I lean to think, as you,
The grace that such repent is any jail-bird's due :
I rather see the fruit of twelve years' pious reign—
Astræa Redux, Charles restored his rights again !
—Of which, another time ! I somehow feel a peace
Stealing across the world. May deeds like this increase !
So, Master Sheriff, stay that sentence I pronounced
On those two dozen odd : deserving to be trounced
Soundly, and yet,—well, well, at all events despatch
This pair of—shall I say, sinner-saints ?—ere we catch
Their jail-distemper too. Stop tears, or I 'll indite
All weeping Bedfordshire for turning Bunyanite ! "

So, happily hanged were they,—why lengthen out my tale?—

Where Bunyan's Statue stands facing where stood his Jail.

LONDON: PRINTED BY
SPOTTISWOODE AND CO., NEW-STREET SQUARE
AND PARLIAMENT STREET

POEMS

BY

ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING.

POEMS BY ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING.

Five vols. Eleventh Edition, with Portrait. Crown 8vo. 30*s.*

AURORA LEIGH.

With Portrait. Fifteenth Edition. Crown 8vo. 7*s.* 6*d.*

Gilt edges, 8*s.* 6*d.*

A SELECTION FROM THE POETRY OF ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING.

Eighth Edition, with Portrait and Vignette.

Crown 8vo. 7*s.* 6*d.* Gilt edges, 8*s.* 6*d.*

London: SMITH, ELDER, & CO., 15 Waterloo Place.

POEMS BY ROBERT BROWNING.

POETICAL WORKS OF ROBERT BROWNING.
New and Uniform Edition. 6 vols. Fcp. 8vo. 5*s*. each.

LA SAISIAZ: The Two Poets of Croisic.
Fcp. 8vo. 7*s*.

THE AGAMEMNON OF ÆSCHYLUS.
Transcribed by ROBERT BROWNING. Fcp. 8vo. 5*s*.

PACCHIAROTTO, AND HOW HE WORKED IN DISTEMPER.
WITH OTHER POEMS. Fcp. 8vo. 7*s*. 6*d*.

THE INN ALBUM.
Fcp. 8vo. 7*s*.

RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY;
OR, TURF AND TOWERS.
Fcp. 8vo. 9*s*.

THE RING AND THE BOOK.
4 vols. Fcp. 8vo. 5*s*. each.

BALAUSTION'S ADVENTURE;
INCLUDING A TRANSCRIPT FROM EURIPIDES.
Fcp. 8vo. 5*s*.

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY;
INCLUDING A TRANSCRIPT FROM EURIPIDES, BEING THE LAST ADVENTURE OF BALAUSTION.
Fcp. 8vo. 10*s*. 6*d*.

FIFINE AT THE FAIR.
Fcp. 8vo. 5*s*.

PRINCE HOHENSTIEL-SCHWANGAU, SAVIOUR OF SOCIETY.
Fcp. 8vo. 5*s*.

A SELECTION FROM THE POETICAL WORKS OF ROBERT BROWNING.
New Edition, Enlarged. Crown 8vo. 7*s*. 6*d*. Gilt edges, 8*s*. 6*d*.

London: SMITH, ELDER, & CO., 15 Waterloo Place.

Digitized with financial assistance from the
Government of Maharashtra
on 18 July, 2018